United Nations E/CN.5/2012/NGO/7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 2011

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fiftieth session
1-10 February 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by Dominican Leadership Conference and Sisters of Charity Federation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

11-59771 (E) 091211

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Statement

Currently, 1.4 billion of the world's 7 billion people live on less than $1.25 a day. Annually, national Governments around the globe spend on average $236 per person on military expenditures. At an informal meeting with young people in New York in 2010, the Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, stated that, every year, the world spends $1.4 trillion on weapons, that with a fraction of that we could cut poverty, fund schools, provide health care and protect the environment, and that one year of global military spending could pay the United Nations budget for 732 years. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, world military expenditure in 2010 is estimated to have reached $1.62 trillion. This represents a 1.3 per cent increase in real terms since 2009 and a 50 per cent increase since 2001.

Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations states that, in order to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's economic and human resources, the Security Council shall be responsible for formulating, with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee, plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments. Both the members of the Security Council and the Member States themselves have neglected this responsibility, directly contributing to both the rampant spread of poverty worldwide and the chronic instability which undermines any efforts to bring about genuine peace. There can be no serious commitment on the part of the States Members of the United Nations to poverty eradication without addressing global military spending and its direct impact on both the environment and people living in poverty.

Millennium Development Goals

In paragraph 8 of the Millennium Declaration, the leaders of the world pledged that they would spare no effort to free its peoples from the scourge of war and would seek to eliminate the dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction. It is estimated that it would take $102 billion a year to meet Goal 1, on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. The annual cost of achieving all eight of the Goals is estimated to be $329 billion. This is less than one fifth of the amount currently spent each year for military purposes.

Climate change

It is time to make the connection between military spending, poverty eradication and the phenomenon of global climate change, which not only contributes to global poverty, but also threatens the peace and security of the Earth and its peoples. According to a report by the non-profit research organization CNA, when climates change significantly or environmental conditions deteriorate to the point that necessary resources are not available, societies can become stressed, sometimes to the point of collapse.

The catastrophic effects of climate change in already vulnerable parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East will include an increase in disease and migration flows, as well as a severe decline in both food production and the availability of clean water. Ultimately, that will lead to increased violence as competition for scarce resources becomes heightened and Governments resort to military action to

keep the peace. To break the vicious circle, Governments need to invest in the development of their people through social programmes, education, health care, sustainable agriculture and infrastructure. Also, given the relationship between poverty and global climate change, Governments must recognize that the countries that are least able to adapt to the consequences of climate change are the ones that will be most disastrously affected. Consequently, Governments that have the resources to do so should finance the adaptation to climate change within their respective countries and assist the most vulnerable countries in their efforts to mitigate the negative impact of climate change on the lives of their people. Current military spending must be decreased and resources reallocated to provide funding for mitigation and adaptation.

Development and disarmament

United Nations documents show the integral relationship between disarmament, development and security. It is essential that the disarmament and development agendas complement one other. War and the threat of war do not create a more secure world. Instead, they create a culture of violence and fear that destroys lives and the environment and does little to create a sense of security.

In an era when the global financial and economic crisis has resulted in a decrease in public spending for social development, nations have continued to increase their military spending. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, of those countries for which data was available, 65 per cent increased their military spending in real terms in 2009. The increase was particularly pronounced among larger economies, both developing and developed: 16 of the 19 States in the Group of 20 increased military spending in real terms. According to a 2011 report by the organization Global Policy Forum, the United Nations and all its agencies and funds spend about $30 billion each year, or about $4 for each of the world's inhabitants. That is a very small sum compared with most Government budgets and is less than 3 per cent of the world's military spending. Yet for nearly two decades, the United Nations has faced financial difficulties and been forced to cut back on important programmes in all areas, even as new mandates have arisen.

National security is enhanced when social development is a priority in national agendas. The continued emphasis on military spending as a means of providing security, both nationally and globally, does not address the root causes of instability and insecurity for many of the world's people. Such causes include a lack of food, housing, clean water and sanitation, access to health care and educational opportunities as well as the negative impacts of climate change.

Women and armed conflict

Women account for 70 per cent of the world's poor and are disproportionately affected by the ravages of war. Women who remain at home to care for children and tend to their crops are increasingly encountering rape and death in villages and cities where fighting is taking place. Despite international agreements not to target civilians in military ventures, civilians, especially women and children, are often the victims of violence, sometimes at the hands of the very people who are supposed to protect them.

Building a culture of peace

A culture of peace has as its base a respect for the rights and dignity of every human being. As defined by the United Nations, the culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations. Human rights and a culture of peace are complementary: whenever war and violence dominate, there is no possibility to ensure human rights; at the same time, without human rights, in all their dimensions, there can be no culture of peace.

In order to abolish war and violent conflict, which disproportionately utilize national and natural resources, there is a need for a paradigm shift that acknowledges commonalities among people and emphasizes the social, environmental and economic aspects of development.

Recommendations

We therefore recommend that Member States:

- Recommit to Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations, and mandate the Security Council to submit to Member States plans for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments
- Reallocate significant portions of defence budgets to poverty eradication and climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Impose a peace and development tax on the arms trade to mobilize resources for eradicating poverty
- Integrate economic, social and environmental aspects of development into national agendas
- Recommit to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, International Federation of Women in Legal Careers, International Federation of Women Lawyers, Service and Research Foundation of Asia on Family and Culture, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and UNANIMA International.